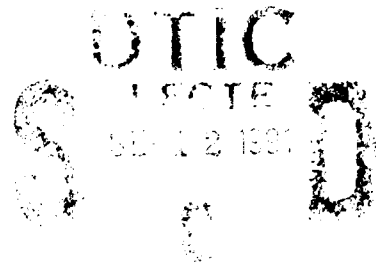


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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, Rhode Island



**A NEW THREAT TO THE NATION'S WAR FIGHTING
CAPABILITY**

by

MICHAEL D. O'BRIEN

Lieutenant Colonel, United States Army

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Operations Department.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _____

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Abstract of
A NEW THREAT TO THE NATION'S WAR FIGHTING CAPABILITY

Technology has created a new capability to threaten this nation's war fighting capability. Through the U.S. television news media, the enemy has the ability to transmit from their capital directly into the living rooms of American citizens. They can utilize this media tool to present their perspective. Enemy leaders will attempt to use this new weapon to influence the will of the people and quite possibly the nation's ability to fight. The Desert Storm conflict allowed us to watch Saddam Hussein unsuccessfully attempt this. The creation of new laws, the Department of Defense public affairs organizations, and the psychological operations organizations are reviewed to determine how each could work to counter this new threat. The psychological operations organizations appear to have the basis to accomplish the mission. Assistance from intelligence organizations can also aid the effort. The United States must solve this problem before the next conflict.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
ABSTRACT.....	i
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
II THE PROBLEM.....	3
III POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS.....	9
LEGAL.....	10
PUBLIC AFFAIRS.....	12
PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS.....	14
IV CONCLUSION.....	17
NOTES.....	20
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	21

INTRODUCTION

The recent Desert Shield and Desert Storm operations have taught the United States military many new lessons, revalidated some old lessons and invalidated others. These lessons will certainly provide much discussion on tactics, equipment, strategic lift, power projection, light versus heavy ground forces, stealth versus conventional capabilities, precision guided weapons versus iron bombs and the success of the "new" Joint Chiefs of Staff organization. There will also be discussions concerning the revitalization of the United Nations as the international forum for peace and security, the continued validity of an alliance as a practical approach to security situations, the latest cost sharing techniques with the most economically capable nations sharing in the efforts through either actual military support or financial assistance, and the initiation of economic sanctions as the starting point in confronting the this type of aggression with a gradual escalation to actual military action as an appropriate approach to such problems. But this is generally a restatement of facts that have been covered in all of the various media and has been discussed in locker rooms, classrooms and on the floor in Congress. Yet there is another aspect of this desert war that struck home to every American both military and civilian, and had a significant impact on many foreigners as well. It will remain vivid in the minds of many of us as we watched our television sets and saw the real time action of coalition air forces bombing the capital of Iraq when the air war started, as we watched the news media struggle with fear during the first "Scud"

impacts in Israel trying to determine if they carried chemical warheads, as we watched Tomahawk cruise missiles fly past television cameras en route to their targets and as we watched the nightly telecasts from the enemy's capital carried live in the middle of a war where American military forces were engaged in battle.

Who in the United States military fully realized what the modern news media was capable of and what they would be able to do during this desert war? Who was planning what the military should do if the news media were to show aspects of the war that could raise public sentiment against the involvement? Who had the plan in their hand that would be implemented if the television news media were able to transmit directly, real time from the enemy capital city? It is reasonable to assume that some of this planning was done by the Department of Defense Public Affairs personnel, but I don't think anyone had the foresight to envision the actual coverage that was available to the American public, and for that matter, the entire world. Certainly the Pentagon and the news organizations realized the technical capabilities, but few seemed to fully understand the full impact of these capabilities. This was highlighted during Ted Turner's interview by Larry King on his program 14 May 91 when Turner said he switched on the television to CNN and watched the live reporting. He then switched to the other networks and realized they had something truly fantastic. Everyone was going to be able to watch the war live from their living rooms. This paper is not going to throw darts at the military public affairs leadership for not

seeing clearly the future, but more so, this paper will focus on the television media's capability to provide this or better coverage in any future conflicts and what the military should do to effectively deal with this new challenge to our security. The military for its part reacted quite well to this new news capability, but avoided the potentially difficult aspect of a prolonged ground war and all the death and destruction that could have been aired.

THE PROBLEM

Does the fact that the television news media can provide real time television from the capital of an enemy engaged in combat with United States military forces create a problem for the government and the military? The answer to this depends on what the perceived impact of this type of television is on a nation's will, and further, the importance of the nation's will to the success of the combat forces.

There has been debate about the effectiveness of television in influencing the United State's final withdrawal from Vietnam and in changing the public's attitude over the course of the war.

"[t]he media contradicted the more positive view of the war officials sought to project, and for better or worse it was the journalists' view that prevailed with the public, whose disenchantment forced an end to American involvement [in

Vietnam]. Often this view is coupled with its corollary, that television has decisively changed the political dynamics of war so that no "televised war" can long retain political support."¹

In the same book as quoted above, The Uncensored War, Daniel Hallin indicated that the British government paid very close attention to this view of the impact of wartime television coverage on public sentiment and imposed tight controls over any news broadcasts from the Falkland Islands during that crisis.

Still the actual influence that television has on public opinion has not been clearly demonstrated. "Adams (1981) compared trends in television news content with changes in American public opinion concerning several countries in the Middle East. He found correlations that "suggested" but did not prove that television and other mass media had caused change in public opinion."² Certainly part of the problem in trying to measure the actual influence of a media is all of the other variables that are not influenced by the media and yet reflect the public's opinion such as family members directly involved in the war; an individual's profession, i.e. a military officer or foreign affairs officer; ethnic or religious background; and influences of work place and community.

The media may not have an immediate impact, but rather a cumulative affect over time on public opinion. Clausewitz has alluded to the adverse effect of prolonged war and further , [O]nce the expenditure

of effort exceeds the value of the political object, the object must be renounced and peace must follow."³ Another way to say this is once the political objective becomes confused or disappears, war termination must follow. The prolonged aspect of war seems to have a tendency to dilute the objectives of the war, and this phenomenon is clear to most involved in the Vietnam War. President Bush, the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were all aware of this when they continually highlighted the point that this conflict, Desert Storm, would be as quick as possible and the troops would not remain a minute longer than the fighting required.

It may be very difficult to scientifically prove that the television can be used to sway public opinion, yet many will intuitively feel that it does exactly that. You only have to recall the tremendously large sums of money various advertiser's paid to advertise on television during the Olympic Games of 1988, the Super Bowl and the World Series. These advertiser's paid these large sums because they could attribute their messages on television almost directly to increased product purchases. Consequently, it is relatively easy to see that there is some impact on the public, in the case of advertising it results in consumer purchases. Certainly there must be some equally significant impact on public opinion. The question is to what degree? In his book News Coverage of the Sandinista Revolution, Jushua Muravchik relates how some of the American press were fooled by the Sandinistas, and their true goals were hidden from the press. Some of the press dutifully reported these false

reports to the American public and quite possibly swayed public and Congressional opinion.⁴

In recent years, the ability of the public to directly influence the President's ability to wage war has had a significant shot in the arm through the War Powers Resolution and the requirement of that resolution for the Congress to authorize United States military forces to remain in a foreign country for extended periods of time and to authorize American forces to be committed to international situations that have a high potential for combat. Even though this is somewhat an oversimplification of the War Powers Resolution, in the eyes of the Congress it gives them the power to commit or withdraw forces that a President has deployed. There are three interesting aspects concerning this power. First, most Presidents have disagreed with the actual authority of Congress on this matter. Second, the President has sixty days to act before Congress acts on the resolution. And third, Congress has always believed it did have the power as outlined in the resolution. When Congress voted a resolution to support the President in the Desert Storm Operation in January 1991, it could have just as easily have voted not to support the President, and the United States would have had to withdraw its forces from the conflict. This fact did not go unnoticed in Saddam Hussein's eyes.

Let's look at this situation from Iraq's point of view. If Iraq could have influenced the opinion of the American public by using American provided real time television news media, and this new public opinion

was made obvious to the Members of Congress, then the Congress could have voted a resolution in January 1991 to withdraw American military forces from the region. If this had transpired, Saddam Hussein would have won the war without firing one shot at the coalition forces and at little actual cost to his country, since CNN provided the equipment.

There was another attempt by Iraq to influence the public opinion, and this time it was world opinion. The firing of the Scud missiles at targets in Israel in an attempt to provoke an Israeli counter attack was aimed at causing dissent in the Arab coalition members. All of the various news media, especially those who broadcast internationally, played right into the hands of Saddam Hussein's strategy. It does not take much imagination to see what might have happened if the coalition broke up leaving only British and United States forces in Saudi Arabia. The reaction of the American public to going it alone in Desert Storm could have been quite different. Further, it is not clear that Saudi Arabia would have allowed United States forces to remain in their country and fight the war from there.

History shows that Saddam Hussein was not successful in his efforts. There will no doubt be several studies to determine why he didn't have better success using the media to influence world and American public opinion. It may well be as Ambassador April Gillisipe said during her Senate Foreign Affairs Committee Hearings this year, "I just didn't realize how stupid he [Saddam Hussein] was." Iraq either did

not possess the properly skilled people to analyze the various means of influencing the American public, or the Iraqi leadership didn't pay attention to the proper advice. What ever the reason, their efforts failed. But more importantly, the next enemy of the United States will certainly try to do a better job when they fight the United States in a war. There is no cheaper way to defeat the United States than through a good media campaign. As mentioned previously, if a small and relatively unsophisticated organization like the Sandinista's can manipulate the press for their own goals, it is not too difficult to imagine what a larger, wealthier country would be capable of.

Desert Shield and Desert Storm did serve to highlight the seriousness of the enemy's manipulation of the news media and the potential impact on American and world opinions. Although, some will question the seriousness of this problem and how successful these efforts could be, it appears prudent for the United States military to develop agencies and techniques to provide counters to this threat.

Before the problem aspect of this paper is set aside to look for solutions, there is a similar area of news media that has military operational security concerns that must be addressed, and that is the enemy's capability to receive United States news media broadcasts. Many of the broadcasts during the Desert Shield Operation indicated specific military units that were deploying to the Middle East and many times even indicated their general arrival dates. These news broadcast

also had military analysts and retired senior military officers reviewing potential battle plans, actual fighting techniques and tactics, and discussing in detail various weapon capabilities and limitations. In fact, the Congressional hearings on the Desert Shield Operations were televised to the public through C-SPAN. The Iraqi representative to the United Nations or the Ambassador and staff could tape these assessments and forward them directly to the Iraqi high command. Many of the news broadcasts could be received directly through satellite links by the Iraqi high command. All of these various information sources could provide a future enemy of the United States easily attainable and cheap intelligence information just as they did for Iraq.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The potential threat to United States military operations and soldier's lives posed by the television news media problems outlined in the previous chapter strongly indicate that the military should take steps to minimize the effects of these problems. How to do this poses several very difficult problems. First, the potential for unlawfully tampering with freedom of speech is very serious. Second, manipulating or providing disinformation to the news media would also have serious consequences once discovered. Consequently, most solutions would have to focus on blocking the transmissions of information to the enemy, or providing rapid and correct responses to news media transmissions from

the enemy camp with techniques to expose the enemies covert use of the news media. This chapter will focus on three possible approaches to resolving this problem. The three approaches are legal, public affair agencies and psychological operations.

LEGAL

A possible approach to the problems caused by enemy countries receiving and transmitting televised news is to have the Department of Defense (DOD) convince Congress that some special laws need to be passed. These laws could provide the government the power to regulate the reception of news broadcasts from an enemy country. Further, they could also restrict or require that DOD preview and approve the news programs that have any military information that could be useful to an enemy's military. This would include those programs that had the expert military analysts and the retired senior military commentators providing possible tactical solutions to the current situation. There are rules available for censoring reports from the front lines and censoring the mail of the soldiers writing home. However, most of the censorship rules are reserved for declared war and do not recognize this new problem of real time television broadcasts. Further, current military strategic thought has determined that regional conflicts, similar to Desert Storm, will be the most likely combat scenario as opposed to a major declared war. Censorship may not be invoked because of the general dislike for that kind of infringement on freedom of speech. Yet, the American public

was quite vocal during the Desert Storm conflict expressing concern that too much information was being given out by the Pentagon news briefings and the public also questioned the Television Weather Channel about their showing the weather over the Iraqi theater of operations. They were indicating their concern that Saddam Hussein would be able to get that information.

The proposal to initiate legislation to provide laws to counter this problem would also bring this issue into the public domain for discussion. The result of this could focus world attention on the issue and make the situation far worse than it is today. For example, a public discussion may prompt terrorist organizations to invite the news media to report on a future terrorist act that would then be view by virtually the entire world in real time. The impact of this type of action should be obvious and a new form of terrorism would be born.

Even if the United States Congress passed laws that would protect the reception of enemy transmissions and prevent the enemy from receiving militarily critical information that would only be applicable to United States news organizations. It is certainly probable that international news organizations would then rush to fill the void and quite possibly all of the legal efforts would be wasted. However, there may be an opportunity for the United Nations to develop an international convention to deal with this issue. The enforcement of this United Nation's position would be through international sanctions and the

international court and these would carry no real guarantee that news organizations would abide with these rules.

Although the legal approach to this problem may provide some solutions, the other approaches are not quite as dramatic and public, and consequently may be much easier to implement.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The public affairs organizations in the Department of Defense are the normal interface for the news media. These organizations working from guidance from the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs and from their own service senior leadership provide news conferences and information for both the public and the news media. Certainly the American public is now more aware of the DOD daily news briefings that were televised from the Pentagon during the Desert Storm conflict. General Kelly from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Pete Williams the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs became household names during this period.

The mission of the public affairs organizations '...involves such functions as :

- o Releasing official information to the public about armed forces activities and operations
- o Answering news media inquiries

o..Providing news media access to armed forces installations, personnel, and operations... "5

The public affairs organization is also a source of security reviews or censorship of news articles generated by news agencies. During the Vietnam War the DOD did not enforce any censorship rules.⁶ However, during the early stages of the Desert Storm conflict, DOD public affairs established some censor rules, use of pool reporters, escorted tours for reporters and generally interfered with reporters and television film crews. Later in the conflict "...Pete Williams,..., issued a final set of "ground rules" for the impending combat coverage in Saudi Arabia.⁷ The public affairs organizations still have some wounds to heal with the press and certainly some new rules of conduct to establish for the next war. The press has its work cut for it also because of the obvious lack of knowledgeable military reporters. "This became clear even before hostilities began ... [D]ispatched to cover the buildup, many journalist found themselves dealing with an alien culture [the military]:they could not quite get straight either the unit designations or the language.⁸ Yet, it is because the public affairs organizations and the news organizations work together on a daily basis that things like this work themselves out. It is for this very fact, that the press must have confidence in the fidelity and credibility of the DOD public affairs organizations, that they are the wrong agencies to effectively deal with countering the real time television problem. Certainly they will have to implement some decisions and rules established to counter this problem, but their hands should be clean of the development any new counterpropaganda operations.

PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS

The name psychological operations usually and correctly invokes images of helicopters flying near enemy line with loud speakers broadcasting surrender messages, airplanes dropping millions of leaflets telling why it is better to give up rather than fight, or powerful broadcast stations sending propaganda programs over normal radio and television stations. These images are primarily the tactical aspect of the psychological operations (PSYOP). According to the US Army Field Manual FM 33-1, Psychological Operations U.S. Army Doctrine, PSYOP has the following operational elements; propaganda development, production of propaganda materials, dissemination of propaganda materials and information, research and analysis of both on going programs and future or potential programs, and current intelligence to identify targets for PSYOP exploitation.⁹ PSYOP also has a strategic and tactical aspect of operations, but the most common is a theater type operation. Again as FM 33-1 states, PSYOP personnel have the mission of both defense against enemy PSYOP and also to conduct counterpropaganda operations in theater.

"Counterpropaganda includes-

- (1) Acknowledgement of reversals prior to exploitation to forestall enemy PSYOP.
- (2) Direct Counterpropaganda to rebuttal enemy PSYOP. Misuse may increase the credibility of enemy PSYOP

and serve as feedback to indicate its effectiveness. Consequently, this method should be used with caution.

(3) Indirect propaganda to introduce themes which refute enemy PSYOP by implication or insinuation.

(4) Diversionary counterpropaganda to focus attention on situations advantageous to the originator.

(5) Imitative deception techniques may be used to refute or decrease the credibility of enemy propaganda."¹⁰

Although this Army manual recognizes the need for counter-propaganda and it is included as a mission for the PSYOPS organizations, it is targeted at the theater or operational level and not the national and international level. In other words, the current focus deals with the Tokyo Rose or Baghdad Betty broadcasts not the CNN live from Baghdad news broadcast. As identified in the Problem chapter, the real time news broadcasts from the enemies capital should be the focus of a national counterpropaganda or counter PSYOP program. Given the fact that the U.S. Army has already worked with this problem on a regional or theater basis, implementing this program on a national basis with the state of communications technology today seems reasonably feasible.

It is possible to see some application of this counterpropaganda used during the recent Desert Storm campaign either by chance or design. One of the most memorable news reports might well be the "command bunker" in Baghdad that coalition forces hit with smart bombs. The Iraq government, using the CNN broadcast crew, told a story of coalition forces bombing an "air raid" shelter full of women and children. DOD quickly countered with pictures of the smart weapon attack indicating that the

target was struck on purpose and further releasing the intelligence data to show that it was a command bunker and may have also unfortunately held the families of highly placed Iraqi officials. The public rage and furor that Iraq was looking for in the American public never truly surfaced.

Another example was the United States releasing intelligence showing that the Iraqi's intentionally destroyed a mosque in an attempt to raise Moslem emotions by claiming the coalition forces destroyed a religious place of worship. Still another example was the United States reporting that one of the crying Iraqi mothers filmed by CNN at the site of an alleged allied bombing raid was actually an Iraqi diplomat pretending to be a distraught mother.

These are several possible examples of the type of counter PSYOP or counterpropaganda operations that the United States must develop to a fine art before the next regional conflict. As stated above, the U.S. Army doctrine and mission for the PSYOP units recognize this mission on a smaller scale, but now it needs to have an additional focus on a larger national and international scale. It is not within the scope of this report to determine if additional resources or force structure is required, but more to clarify the point that this additional capability needs to be developed. The Iraqi Ministry of Information and Culture was the propaganda tool for the Iraqi government and their mission was "...the purpose of deflecting allied will, of postponing and finally putting off all

thought of attack by the forces massed in the Saudi desert."¹¹ History records that they were not successful in their mission, but just as the Iraqi government tried so will our next enemy and they will certainly do better.

CONCLUSION

The Problem chapter developed the problem of the enemy's control of the real time television news broadcasts from their own capital and how that could effect the public opinion in America. If public opinion or public will is the "center of gravity" in America, and it certainly is one of the centers of gravity, then there is a direct threat to our war fighting capability that must be protected. The next chapter explored three approaches to countering this threat. The legal approach risks highlighting the problem and runs into a freedom of speech issue that might tie the solution up in court debate. There may be less drastic legal approaches such as requiring all retired military who might serve as experts for various news programs to first clear their information through DOD public affairs offices. Further, the scope and detail of their commentaries might also be approved or cleared through appropriate DOD agencies.

The public affairs organizations are also looked at as possible agencies to solve this problem of enemy propaganda, but because of their unique relationship with the press it is felt that they should not be directly involved. Their credibility with the press must be protected. Public affairs organizations may well implement and carryout the programs developed to counter this problem, but their efforts should be open and capable of withstanding severe scrutiny.

The last area covered was the PSYOP organizations. They already have the mission to do counterpropaganda operations and defensive psychological operations with in a theater of operations. The new task is to develop a capability to do this same mission on a national or international basis. Using the existing PSYOP assets and those of the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency and other existing appropriate agencies such as the Department of State, the techniques for combating this problem can be updated and formalized. The end product of this effort should be a cell, or group within the theater PSYOPS organization, tied electronically to the DOD public affairs organization. Their mission would be to develop plans and techniques to counter any enemy propaganda, implement those techniques as required, and coordinate between the two organizations.

This paper is not an attempt to solve this problem. It was developed to highlight a serious threat to our war fighting capabilities and to provide some thoughts on possible solutions. It should now be the

mission of those skilled in the art of psychological warfare, propaganda, public affairs, and television news broadcasting to develop the plans, the techniques, and the systems to negate this potential enemy advantage. The time to do this is now, because our next enemy is developing its skills at this very moment to exploit our freedom of speech.

NOTES

Chapter II

1. Daniel Hallin, The Uncensored War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 3 and 4.
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3. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, ed. On War (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 92.
4. Joshua Muravahik, News Coverage of the Sandinista Revolution, (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1988).

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5. Alexander Angelle, US Armed Forces Public Affairs Roles in Low- Intensity Conflict, (Virginia: A-AF CLIC Langley Air Force Base, 1988), p.3.
6. Peter Braestrup, "Censored," The New Republic, February 11, 1991, pp. 16-17.
7. Ibid., p. 16.
8. Ibid.
9. Department of the Army, Psychological Operations U.S. Army Doctrine, FM 33-1 (Washington: 1971).
10. Ibid., p. 2-5.
11. Donald Kirk, "Ministry of Peace," National Review, December 17, 1990, p. 22.

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